

Small but spirited crowd takes to wet streets for 2019 Memphis Women's March

[Linda A. Moore](#), [Memphis Commercial Appeal](#) Published 2:49 p.m. CT Jan. 19, 2019 | Updated 2:57 p.m. CT Jan. 19, 2019

Weather forecasters promised a day of rain, but showers held off long enough Saturday morning for a few hundred spirited protesters to take part in this year's Memphis Women's March.

Several hundred marchers of varying ages, races and gender identities met at Memphis City Hall and marched a few blocks to the Judge D'Army Bailey Shelby County Court House, where speakers urged participants to move from marching to activism and encouraged intersectionality.

A lead organizer, Amber Sherman, thanked everyone for attending.

"But I also want to remind you that attending a march means nothing if changed behavior doesn't follow. I want to push past marching and into activism," Sherman said, asking the crowd to embrace the rights of all women.

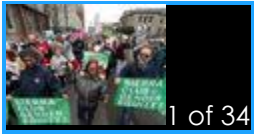
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Women's March 2019 in Downtown Memphis

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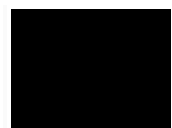
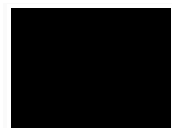


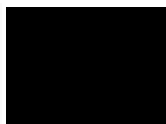
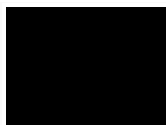
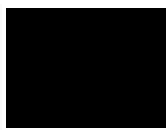
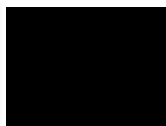
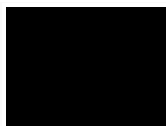
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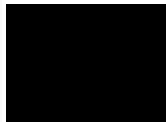
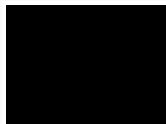
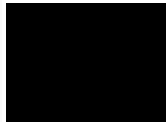


1 of 34









Next Slide

That sentiment was echoed by speaker Mary Thomas, 19, a student at Rhodes College, who described herself as white and middle-class and explained intersectionality, the overlap of various social identities, like race, gender and gender identity.

"To my my peers, my fellow white women, leave space. Leave space for others who have a different story to tell," Thomas said as the crowd cheered. "We must learn to listen."

Unlike [the 2017 march](#), held the day after President Donald Trump was inaugurated, this one did not draw the nearly 6,000 people who marched on a sunny day from the county

courthouse to the National Civil Rights Museum. Sister marches in cities around the globe drew millions that year.

[Last year's event](#), a rally at First Congregational Church in Cooper Young, drew about 1,000 people.

'We have to show in Memphis that we're not a part of the hate'

Although the numbers this year were smaller, placards and T-shirts showed a similar level of diversity that included representatives from Black Lives Matter, the Sierra Club, local anti-violence nonprofit F.U.N.N. (Freedom from Unnecessary Negatives), the LGBT community and Madison (County) Area Democratic Women of Tennessee.



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Paisley Smith, 9, and Devin, 6, holds signs and walk with their parents William and Rileyann as they join the the Women's March downtown Memphis on Saturday, Jan. 19, 2019. (Photo: Joe Rondone/The Commercial Appeal)

Paisley Smith, 9, from Jackson, Tennessee, marched in colorful rubber boots carrying a sign picturing U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

"I want to be president and Donald Trump isn't letting me do that. Because he doesn't like women," she said.

Women, she said "should be allowed to do what men are allowed to do."

Paisley was with her 6-year-old sister, Devin Smith, and parents Rileyann and William Smith.

The adult Smiths were at the 2018 march, while the girls were mad that they weren't allowed to come, William Smith said.

Rileyann Smith was at the 2017 march as well.

"They're hearing all the things on TV and in the news and they wanted to be part of it also," she said.



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Journey Holmes, 10, holds a sign as she joins the Women's March downtown Memphis on Saturday, Jan. 19, 2019. (Photo: Joe Rondone/The Commercial Appeal)

Katherine Paxton, a registered nurse from Memphis, made sure she was off work to attend the march.

"There's no way I'm going to stay away," Paxton said. "We have to show in Memphis that we're not a part of the hate that's going on in our country right now. And even if there are some disagreements, we don't have to foster that."

At the front of the march was long-time Memphis activist "Mother" Georgia King.

"At 78 years old, I've still got boots on the ground in training young people in the area of justice," King said. "I'm out here today because of the job situation and all that they're doing in Washington, D.C."

Bridging divides amid controversy

Nationally, some Jewish women have [opted not to attend the Women's March](#) in Washington and other cities, citing comments about Israel from Women's March board members and the refusal of organizer Tamika Mallory to renounce Minister Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, who has made negative comments about Jews and been accused of anti-Semitism.

U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman-Shultz (D-Fla.), past chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee, wrote an [op-ed piece for USA TODAY](#), explaining why she refused to participate in the D.C. march.

But locally, Jews that include U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, a Memphis Democrat, disagreed with that position. Cohen skipped Trump's inauguration to attend the 2017 Memphis march.



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Congressman Steve Cohen speaks to the crowd gathered in downtown Memphis for the Women's March on Saturday, Jan. 19, 2019. (Photo: Joe Rondone/The Commercial Appeal)

He understands why people who are Jewish have a problem with Farrakhan and why some people who are African-American have a great respect for Farrakhan and the work he has done in African-American communities.

There is no conflict in Memphis between the Jewish and the African-American communities, he said.

"This is about people coming together to support women. And we shouldn't divide ourselves," Cohen said.



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Amber Sherman chants through a megaphone as she leads a group down Adams Avenue during the Women's March downtown Memphis on Saturday, Jan. 19, 2019. (Photo: Joe Rondone/The Commercial Appeal)

Laura Goodman-Bryan is a practicing Reform Jew and attended the march wearing her symbolic pink hat.

Conservatives, Goodman-Bryan said, are willing to stand together and work out their problems within their organizations and stay on point, while liberals often don't.

"I'm here to say I can disagree with you on my religion, but we have other things that we can agree on and let's focus on those," she said.

A corporate executive, Goodman-Bryan said she knows how to get things done.

"And it is by finding points of agreement and pushing forward on those," she said. "We've got to stop fighting or we are lost."

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